

Greek strike wave against brutal austerity attacks

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Greek dockers stormed the country's Ministry of Maritime Affairs last Thursday as part of their fight to demand better pay and conditions. This was after dockers blocked a 21-ton Israeli ammunition shipment at Piraeus Port destined for Haifa, which was to be used to further the genocide of the Palestinians.

The struggle of the dockworkers is part of a broader movement building towards a general strike against Kiriakos Mitsotakis's New Democracy (ND) government.

Millions in various sectors are angered by stagnating wages and attacks on conditions amid a worsening cost-of-living crisis, expressed in the wave of strikes this month by many thousands of workers across different industries. The lengthiest strike was by seamen whose action lasted four days from October 22-25. The strike brought all passenger ships, ferries and cruise liners across Greece to a standstill.

Their demands included a wage increase as well as the repeal of legislation allowing passenger vessels to reduce seamen's annual operational schedule to just four months, effectively making them seasonal workers.

The October 24 storming of the Ministry of Maritime Affairs by Piraeus Container Terminal (PCT) dockers was part of their 48-hour strike demanding higher wages as well as improvement in health and safety conditions.

Working conditions at the PCT, a subsidiary of COSCO Shipping Ports Limited owned by the Chinese state, are notoriously bad with accidents a common occurrence. Just three weeks ago on October 5, a stack of shipping containers collapsed at the terminal, which could have led to multiple fatalities.

Such was the case of 45-year-old Dimitris Dagklis who was crushed by a crane at the facility on October 25 three years ago. The anniversary of Dagklis' death was marked by a memorial at the PCT's facility last Friday attended by striking workers and members of his family.

Public teachers also walked out on October 23 demanding higher wages, a return to the salary scales of 2016-2017 and an increase in staffing levels. Teachers demand the equivalency between permanent and substitute teachers, as well as nine-month parental leave for substitute teachers. Their strike took place in defiance of a court decision ruling in favour of the government, declaring the stoppage illegal.

During the day teachers marched in their thousands in Athens.

School cleaners struck for 48-hours on October 24, demanding more hiring; full-time permanent status for union members instead

of fixed-term contracts, a collective labour agreement, certification of professional skills, certification of cleaning and disinfection products and timely salary payments.

The defiance of the ruling by the teachers was significant as it followed the ruling illegal by a court of an October 10 national strike by rail workers. The rail workers are still demanding basic safety measures on the network, more than 18 months after the Tempi train crash—the deadliest in Greek history. The rail workers union folded and accepted the strike ban, which was imposed on the basis of the complaint by Hellenic Train that the strikers' demands were nothing to do with them, but with the infrastructure company Hellenic Railways Organization.

Also striking for 24 hours were food and tourism workers who held several protests including outside the Ministry of Labour and the offices of the Hoteliers' Union. The action by the members of the Panhellenic Federation of Food and Tourism Workers hit major hotel services. The workers are fighting employer's demands for a 10-hour working day as part of a new collective labour agreement.

On October 17, doctors and healthcare workers struck for 24-hours for a raft of demands and to protest the commercialization and privatization of the public health system. After marching from Mavili Square and passing parliament in Syntagma Square, they hung a banner on the Health Ministry, reading: "We demand salary increases, mass hiring, and the permanent employment of contracted staff."

Healthcare has been decimated by austerity, with public health expenditure cut by over 40 percent between 2009 and 2017. Today there are least 45,000 unfilled positions in hospitals nationally, and many health centres cannot operate 24 hours a day. The strike declaration warned, "Many of the hospitals in the provinces and islands have lost their secondary-care function and have been transformed into ambulance centres with great danger for patients."

Protests by firefighters are being held October 31 and November 1 and protests by mental health advocates on October 31. Strikes by e-delivery workers are set for November 1-2 and by construction workers on November 6. Also on November 6, health workers will strike in Crete with a rally to be held in its capital Heraklion.

The devastation faced by the working class today is the direct consequence of the successive rounds of austerity during the previous decade demanded by the European Union (EU) and the

International Monetary Fund (IMF) in return for receiving loans ostensibly to pay off the national debt, which stood at €330.57 billion in 2010. For example, nearly all the demands of the teachers are for a reversal of measures brought in during the first round of austerity in 2010.

The economy contracted by 25 percent, unprecedented for a European country during peacetime. According to OECD figures real wages declined by a third between 2007 and 2022, with Greek workers today being the poorest in the EU after Bulgaria.

Greece's trade union bureaucracy bears direct responsibility for this social nightmare, having strangled every fightback by workers over the last 15 years. Since 2010, dozens of general strikes were called by the General Confederation of Greek Workers (GSEE) private sector federation, and its public sector counterpart ADEDY, against the attacks on living standards and working conditions rammed through parliament at the behest of the EU and IMF.

In just the years between May 2010 and the end of 2015, the GSEE held 28 general strikes (20 lasting 24 hours and four lasting 48 hours). But the purpose of these strikes was to ensure social anger was corralled under its control while anti-worker measures were voted through.

This was facilitated by the pseudo-left Syriza (Coalition of the Radical Left), swept into power in January 2015 on an anti-austerity mandate that was junked within weeks. Following the July 2015 referendum, in which workers overwhelmingly rejected a third austerity package, Syriza and its junior coalition partner, the far-right Independent Greeks, swiftly agreed to a new austerity package with the EU/IMF. The next four years saw Syriza impose austerity more savage than that enforced by the previous social democratic and New Democracy-led administrations.

These betrayals strengthened the conservative ND, which won last year's election after first defeating Syriza in 2019. ND has intensified the attacks on the working class with a labour bill last September, that included attacks on the right to strike and the introduction of a six-day week in manufacturing, which came into force this summer.

These attacks have earned ND widespread praise from the global financial elite. In its April report, credit agency Standard and Poor's updated its outlook on Greece from "stable" to "positive", writing that "Greek authorities are undertaking a broad ranging structural reform agenda and tackling long-standing bottlenecks."

While there is never any money for workers, there is unlimited money for war and militarism. Greece, as a geopolitically critical member of NATO, this year will spend over €7 billion on its military (around 3 percent of GDP).

Conscious of the widespread discontent among workers, GSEE and ADEDY will hold a general strike on November 20. The fact that a strike wave has broken out in advance of these moves by the union bureaucracy indicates a new stage in the class struggle in Greece with workers drawing a line after a decade and half assault on their living and working conditions.

Bitter experience has shown that militancy is not enough unless the straitjacket of the trade union bureaucracy is thrown off. The leadership of the Panhellenic Seamen's Federation (PNO) has already shut down that strike, despite none of the key demands

being met.

PNO settled for a paltry 7 percent pay rise over two years (5 percent in 2025 and 2 percent in 2026), well below the 12 percent for 2025 demanded while all anti-worker legislation remains in place. The rise of militancy by dock workers in particular has raised concerns within ruling circles, with business news site *capital.gr* speaking of the "negative impact on supply chain operations."

Of equal concern was the courageous action October 17 by dockers at the PCT stopping a shipment of arms headed to Israel. The cargo is currently in the custody of the port authorities while prosecution proceedings are underway against Markos Bekris, leader of the Union of Container Handling Workers (ENEDEP), which organised the action at the PCT.

With the wider union bureaucracy and Syriza widely discredited, the Stalinist Communist Party of Greece (KKE) and its All Militant Workers Front (PAME) have come to the fore.

In its statement for the November 20 general strike, PAME rails against the "compromiser leaderships of GSEE and ADEDY," stating that "their stance all these years has been the basic ally of governments to pass and implement their whole anti-worker edifice."

But while PAME employs militant rhetoric to distance themselves from the union bureaucracy, including holding separate rallies on general strike days, the KKE is an integral part of the bureaucracy. Bekris, aside from leading ENEDEP and sitting on the board of PAME, is also a member of GSEE's governing council.

In a statement at the start of October ENEDEP hailed the shutdown of the strike by the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA), stating that "the dock workers at the ports on the East Coast of the US have shown us the way forward," fraudulently adding that "through their struggle [workers] won a collective contract with significant increases and health and safety measures."

The strike was shut down to ensure the flow of weapons to facilitate the wars of US imperialism. No full contract was signed, with workers sent back to work on a 90-day extension of their current contract, with any increases agreed of a tentative nature only.



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